

# The Freudian Slip

Pathways to Discernment

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## WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM ME!!!!

### Living With Expectations

We all have them, and at times we do not know what to do with them. Some of us over use them and expect the world from others. Some of us do not use them at all and expect nothing from anyone. Some of us flip-flop back and forth from expecting the world to expecting nothing at all. Some of us are reasonable in how much we expect from others.

When placing expectations on a continuum, we each easily move from one extreme to the other. Occasionally some individuals temporarily get stuck at either extreme, while others remain stuck there. Expectations are very dynamic, in that they flow either way. What I mean, is that we have expectations of others and vice versa.

Where did we learn or learn not to be expectant of others? Usually, we all initially learn about expectations from our family. As we grew up, we were expected to do what our parents wanted. Brothers and sisters complicated matters, depending where we fell in the pecking order. Peers influence us in our expectations of being accepted by other people. Society also influences us in our expectations regarding gender, economic status, ethnic origin, and family.

So, what are we supposed to do with all these expectations? First, we have to define the expectations we have of others and how they affect us in our daily lives. To begin the process of understanding our expectations, the ones learned from our family of origin can be a beginning point.

Families vary in how they view the world. Some families are very close, while others are doing well to be in the same room with each other. Then there are families that fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. These patterns have been "handed down" through the generations for various reasons.

Patterns in families develop in two ways. They are learned by watching the example of an individual's parents. They can also be a decision of not doing what a person saw his or her parents do. Patterns are not pure, but a blend of these two approaches.

Many aspects affect the expectations we have. The effectiveness of the communication process in families influences expectations. Families with

poor communication skills, do not have the ability to assertively ask for needs to be met. Mind reading, inferences, assumptions and Innuendos plant the seeds for family members' expectations.

"All or nothing" attitudes within families can polarize self-talk at the extremes. Individuals will generally have expectations that are "set in granite," very rigid and unyielding. Words like "must," "always," "never," and "should" are the hallmarks of polarized expectations. Self-talk associated with these attitudes leans toward personalizing disappointments or believing others are totally uncaring.

Messages received from families resulting in an individual forming a counter-message of "be perfect" create expectations about how individuals need to feel accepted. A "be perfect" attitude can spill over onto others when family or group appearance is vital to being accepted. The individual not only wants himself/herself to be perfect, but others to be perfect.

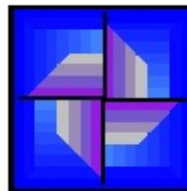
Total competency in any aspect of an individual's life lead to expectations of never being wrong and always being right. Usually this expectation manifests itself in an individual perpetually blaming others for his or her faults, problems and/or inadequacies. Criticism is personalized, resulting in an attitude of "no one understands" or "everyone is stupid."

Getting upset about other people's problems, above what is necessary, can lead to an expectation of taking on others' problems. Individuals, who

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care too much, set themselves up to be overburdened. They find themselves in a “catch-22” situation of being accused of not caring enough or caring too much. An inner conflict can result by an individual questioning his or her value as a “good” Christian.

When individuals view the world as hostile, expectations gravitate toward “finger pointing” and not taking responsibility in his or part of the problem. “If only” phrases preface any comment made about others actions. An example would be, “if only he or she wouldn't be so selfish, then I would be happy,” or “if only he or she would let me express myself, then I would be happy.”

Not all expectations are unreasonable, but when expectations become rigid, they are unreasonable. So how does a person know when he or she is being unreasonable? One clue would be the use of absolute words, which are “always,” “never,” “should,” “ought,” and “must.” Another clue would be self talk triggering a belief that the individual is no better than “pond scum” or “lower than a snake's belly.”

Individuals can “set up” expectations in many different ways. One way would be to “set up” oneself to fail, be rejected or be disappointed. Another way would be to create a situation in which an individual and/or another person is “cornered” and is damned. Either way, the result is the same; in that expectations of acceptance and trust are unattainable.

In tackling expectations, an individual needs to become aware of what his or her expectations are. This is accomplished by taking a moment and asking the simple question of “what do I want from myself, this person or situation?” The trick is to be honest about how the question is answered.

If an expectation deals with other people, how are these individual supposed to behave? Are they to be totally always responsive, caring and fair? Are they to be all knowing and very perceptive always? Are they to be intelligent and capable always? Are they to be responsible for anything that goes wrong? Or, are they supposed to lift the burden from another's shoulders? Or, are they supposed to let us have our way always? For an individual's self expectations, these same questions can be asked by substituting “I” for “they.”

To step back and answer these types of questions requires an individual to put emotions aside and look at the facts of the situation. By objectifying what is happening to an individual, reality creeps into the scene. Expectations of self and others gravitate toward being reasonable.

By taking a “Dragnet” approach to examining expectations, does not mean to become unfeeling robots. Emotions are an integral part of each person's make up. How emotions fit into the scheme of expectations is cyclical.

The process begins with an automatic thought. An emotion is triggered by this thought. A behavior or action is driven by the feeling. Then the original thought is reinforced by the behavior. The key to changing this cycle is to changing the thoughts and doing reality checks on these thoughts.

Automatic thoughts are the tips of an “iceberg” of inner beliefs about oneself and others. So the next step in the process would be to examine what these automatic thoughts are really saying. When bad feelings ensue, the beliefs are usually coming from “out in left field.”

These kinds of beliefs can be lumped into ten categories. One would be that individuals must have the love and approval of others. Another would be that an individual believes he or she must be thoroughly competent and successful.

If an individual experiences another as obnoxious or unfair, the other is seen as wicked, bad or rotten. When things go wrong, they are seen as catastrophic and horrible. Bad feelings are the result of external forces beyond a person's control. Anxiety provoking situations are to be obsessed about and so an individual becomes more anxious about it.

It is easier to avoid problems than to become more responsible for personal actions. The past is to be relived repeatedly so it becomes a dominant force in the present. When life is difficult, then it is seen as awful and nothing good will ever happen. The last category is that happiness is achieved through doing nothing and remaining passive.

People will be disappointed, frustrated and upset periodically throughout their life. This is scriptural, in that “.. for He makes His sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. ...” So when things do not go as planned, look for the lesson to be learned, instead of the present miserable feelings.

Becoming more aware of the automatic thoughts that are triggered can lead to an awareness of the presence of an unrealistic belief. Objectively take an inventory of personal responsibilities vs. others' responsibilities. At this point personal control can be achieved. An individual can only change himself/herself, not others. The need to control others will diminish so expectations can gravitate to becoming reasonable.

### Suggested Reading

*The Dance of Anger* by: Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.  
*The Dance of Connection* by: Harriet Lerner, Ph.D.  
*Who's Pushing Your Buttons* by: John Townsend  
*Happiness is an Inside Job* by John Powell  
*Children of the Self Absorbed* by Nina Brown  
*Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children* by Connie Dawson